



**Billing Code 4310-55**

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

**Fish and Wildlife Service**

**[FWS-R6-R-2012-N183]**

**[FF06R06000-FXRS1266066CCP0S3-123]**

Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge and UL Bend National Wildlife Refuge, MT; Availability of Record of Decision for the Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement

**AGENCY:** Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

**ACTION:** Notice of availability.

**SUMMARY:** We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), announce the availability of a record of decision (ROD) for the final comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and final environmental impact statement (EIS) for Charles M. Russell and UL Bend National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs, Refuges).

**ADDRESSES:** You may view or obtain copies of the ROD, the final CCP and final EIS, or other project information by any of the following methods:

*Agency Website:* Download a copy of the documents at [www.fws.gov/cmr/planning](http://www.fws.gov/cmr/planning).

*E-mail:* [cmrplanning@fws.gov](mailto:cmrplanning@fws.gov). Include “Request copy of Charles M. Russell NWR ROD” in the subject line of the message.

*U.S. mail:* Charles M. Russell NWR, P.O. Box 110, Lewistown, MT 59457.

*In-Person Viewing or Pickup:* Call 406-538-8706 to make an appointment during regular business hours at Charles M. Russell NWR Headquarters, Airport Road, Lewistown, MT 59457.

*Local Libraries:* The final documents are available for review at the libraries listed under **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Richard Potts, Project Leader, at 406-538-8706 (phone), or Laurie Shannon, Planning Team Leader, 303-236-4317 (phone) or [laurie\\_shannon@fws.gov](mailto:laurie_shannon@fws.gov) (email).

## **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

### **Introduction**

With this notice, we finalize the CCP process for Charles M. Russell and UL Bend NWRs. We started this process through a notice in the Federal Register (72 FR 68174, December 4, 2007). Following a lengthy scoping and alternatives development period, we published a second notice in the Federal Register (75 FR 54381, September 7,

2010), announcing the availability of the draft CCP and draft EIS and our intention to hold public meetings, and requesting comments. We then published a third notice in the Federal Register (75 FR 67095, November 1, 2010), extending the comment period by 24 days to December 10, 2010.

Charles M. Russell and UL Bend NWRs encompass nearly 1.1 million acres, including Fort Peck Reservoir in north central Montana. The Refuges extend about 125 air miles west from Fort Peck Dam to the western edge at the boundary of the Upper Missouri Breaks National Monument. UL Bend NWR lies within Charles M. Russell NWR. In essence, UL Bend NWR is a refuge within a refuge, and the two refuges are managed as one unit and referred to as Charles M. Russell NWR. Refuge habitat includes native prairie, forested coulees, river bottoms, and badlands. Wildlife is as diverse as the topography and includes Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, pronghorn, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, sharp-tailed grouse, greater sage-grouse, Sprague's pipit, black-footed ferrets, prairie dogs, and more than 236 species of birds.

In accordance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (40 CFR 1506.6(b)) requirements, this notice announces the availability of the ROD for the final CCP and final EIS for Charles M. Russell NWR and UL Bend NWR. We completed a thorough analysis of the environmental, social, and economic considerations associated with our actions. The ROD documents our selection of alternative D, the preferred alternative.

The CCP will guide us in managing and administering Charles M. Russell NWR and UL Bend NWR for the next 15 years. Alternative D, as we described in the final EIS/ROD, is the foundation for the CCP.

## **Background**

### *The CCP Process*

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee) (Administration Act), as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, requires us to develop a CCP for each national wildlife refuge. The purpose for developing a CCP is to provide refuge managers with a 15-year plan for achieving refuge purposes and contributing toward the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, consistent with sound principles of fish and wildlife management, conservation, legal mandates, and our policies. We will review and update the CCP at least every 15 years in accordance with the Administration Act.

### **CCP Alternatives and Selected Alternative**

Our final CCP and final EIS (77 FR 26781; May 7, 2012) addressed several issues. To address these, we developed and evaluated the following alternatives: Alternative A—No Action, Alternative B—Wildlife Population Emphasis, Alternative C—Public Use and Economic Use Emphasis, and Alternative D—Ecological Processes Emphasis.

After consideration of 24,600 comments that we received on the draft CCP and draft EIS and several minor comments we received following the release of the final CCP and final EIS, we have selected alternative D—Ecological Processes Emphasis. It is the alternative that best meets the purposes of the refuges; the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System; the vision and management goals set for the refuge; and also adheres to Service policies and guidelines. It considers the interests and perspectives of

many agencies, organization, tribes, and the public. Additionally, it is the environmentally preferred alternative.

Under alternative D and in cooperation with our partners, we would use natural, dynamic, ecological processes, and management activities in a balanced, responsible manner to restore and maintain the biological diversity, biological integrity, and environmental health of the Refuge. Once natural processes are restored, a more passive approach (less human assistance) would be favored. There would be quality wildlife-dependent public uses and experiences. Economic uses would be limited when they are injurious to ecological processes.

### **Public Availability of Documents**

In addition to the using any of the methods listed under **ADDRESSES**, you can view or obtain a copy of the final CCP and final EIS at any of the following public libraries:

<b>Library</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Phone Number</b>
Garfield County	228 E. Main, Jordan MT 59337	406-557-2297
Glasgow	408 3rd Avenue, Glasgow MT 59230	406-228-2731
Great Falls	301 2nd Avenue, Great Falls MT 59401	406-453-0349
Lewistown	701 W. Main, Lewistown MT 59457	406-538-5212
McCone County	1101 C Avenue, Circle, MT 59215	406-485-2350
Petroleum County	205 S. Broadway, Winnett, MT 59087	406-429-2451
Phillips County	10 S. 4th Street E., Malta, MT 59538	406-542-2407
Montana State University–Billings	1500 University Drive, Billings, MT 59101	406-657-2011
Montana State University–Bozeman	Roland R. Renne Library, Centennial Mall, Bozeman, MT 59717	406-994-3171
Montana State University–Havre	Northern Vande Bogart Library, Cowan Drive, Havre, MT 59501	406-265-3706
University of Montana	Mansfield Library, 32 Campus Drive, Missoula, MT 59812	406-243-6860

Colorado State University	Morgan Library, 501 University Avenue, Fort Collins, CO 80523	970-491-1841
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**Date:** July 27, 2012

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**Noreen E. Walsh**  
**Acting**  
**Regional Director,**  
**Mountain-Prairie Region,**  
**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

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